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HIGH-SCHOOL LATIN AND THE COLLEGE-ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS: A REPLY

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To the Editors of the "Classical Journal":

MY DEAR SIRs: In justice to the Commission on College-Entrance Requirements in Latin, Dr. D'Ooge's strictures on its report in his article in the October number of this *Journal* should be answered, so far as the article itself does not furnish an answer. If your readers have not forgotten the nature of the instructions given to the Commission, it will have been obvious to them that Dr. D'Ooge's arguments are misdirected. The primary object in the establishment of the Commission was not reform in the school course, but uniformity in college-entrance requirements. That this object was attained, in the face of general doubt of its attainability, is a fact that should have some weight in estimating the wisdom of the Commission's action. If it had been found necessary to take a backward step in order to secure agreement, there would be room for criticism; but there was no retrogression, and Dr. D'Ooge admits that the work of the Commission "has won unqualified approval" in the two important particulars in which an advance was made. No member of the Commission would maintain that further advance is impossible, but I am sure that their experience would lead all of them to advise deliberate and concerted action, that we may not fall again into confusion.

The sacrifice of individual opinions to the agreement of the Commission was not due to any weakness of conviction or to mere complaisance, but to the most practical of considerations. It was clear that only unanimous recommendations would have a chance of universal acceptance, and that positive assurances that the colleges represented on the Commission would not accept a particular proposal vitiated that proposal for the purpose of the

Commission. Dr. D'Ooge's supposition of a refractory individual is gratuitous. As I said in the article to which he refers, all members of the Commission cheerfully surrendered their personal predilections. Dr. D'Ooge assumes that it was a wiser majority that yielded in what he believes to be the unfortunate features of a compromise. It would be improper for me to discuss this point, but I do not hesitate to express the opinion that the yielding at least was evidence of wisdom.

Dr. D'Ooge really objects only to the list of works from which the schools are expected to choose their reading. No such list will satisfy everyone, as the history of the college-entrance requirements in English testifies. Dr. D'Ooge thinks there should be no list, but he does not take account of the advantage of homogeneity in the reading of a given year of those who must take an examination in sight-translation at the end of that year. What reasonable or conclusive test could be set for students who might have read any of the authors and works approved by him directly, or indirectly, for the second year—Caesar, Nepos, Eutropius, Florus, fables, *Viri Romae*, Curtius, Catullus, Cicero, Livy, Horace, Ovid, and Vergil? I shall not undertake to plead the cause of Caesar; but it should be noted that the familiar counts in Dr. D'Ooge's indictment have lost something of their force. Difficulties and monotonousness may now be avoided, in some measure at least, by careful selection and grading of the passages to be read, and the charge of remoteness from the interest of children is peculiarly ill-timed. Probably nothing ever written in Latin would be more interesting this year than the *Gallic War*. As for literary inspiration I am not sure that it can be sought in the work of the second year of Latin without relinquishing other aims of greater importance at this stage, nor am I sure what reading Dr. D'Ooge would recommend as satisfying this requirement. He states his views about the reading of the third and fourth years more definitely, and here his criticism of the Commission's list is less severe. His suggestion that Horace, Catullus, and comedy be thrown open to the schools is not likely to appeal to many teachers; indeed, few are willing to give any time even to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, despite all its excellence for school use. Finally, it is hard to see how Dr.

D'Ooge can reconcile his opinions regarding the other reading of the course with his contention that Cicero's letters are beyond the grasp of high-school students. The Commission did not, of course, regard all the letters as suitable for school use, any more than Dr. D'Ooge regards all of Plautus, Terence, Horace, and Catullus as suitable for such use.

Dr. D'Ooge says: "The unfortunate fact that the report of the Commission has settled nothing is now made clear by recent steps taken by the National Education Association." He refers to the appointment of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. There is not the slightest warrant or foundation for his inference. The Committee on Ancient Languages of the National Education Association's commission exists only because the ancient languages are taught in secondary schools. It has issued no report, and I have heard nothing in the two meetings of the committee to indicate that any of my colleagues supposes our task to be the correction of the mistakes of the Commission on College-Entrance Requirements in Latin. In fact, we started with the assumption that we are not concerned with college-entrance requirements. It may be that the result of our deliberations will be a change in the Latin course of the schools, and that this change will lead to new entrance requirements, in accordance with the demand of the National Education Association that the colleges accept whatever the schools offer.

Since Dr. D'Ooge mentions my name, I may perhaps be allowed to say a few words for myself. Dr. D'Ooge imputes to me "amazing ignorance of the real situation," in that I once said that there was no indication that the majority of schools were not content to stay in the rut of the traditional reading. I ask your readers to bear in mind that this was said nearly five years ago, that I was stating my belief as to what was true rather than my opinion as to what was desirable, and that I spoke of the majority of schools and all the reading. Now Dr. D'Ooge's *crux* is, of course, the reading of the second year. It is a fact that there has been a long and furious attack upon this part of the Latin course, but Caesar is strongly intrenched. That the assailants have a good cause, that they are well led, that their trumpet-calls are loud and clear does not

establish their numerical superiority. So Dr. D'Ooge's assertion of my ignorance of the situation is far from proved. The evidence which he presents might more properly have been used to reinforce another quotation from me: "I have found a rather strong feeling that we should have made a more radical departure from the traditional requirements." It is scarcely necessary to point out that my two statements are not contradictory. Their relation is, I think, plain in the context in which they stand.

I believe the recent growth of the feeling that there should be a wider choice in the reading of the second year may be credited, to some extent, to the Commission. The fruition of the large freedom promised in its report has quickened interest and inspired confidence. Yet even now the publishers say that there is little demand for books that leave the beaten path, and we cannot feel sure that the majority of schools will soon change their reading. Many colleges adopted the recommendations of the Committee of Ten and the Committee of Twelve without adequate response. As to the situation five years ago, the Commission was so constituted as to insure full information of the practice and wishes of the schools. It contained seven school men, among them representatives of great high schools in St. Louis, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Hartford. The action of the New York State Education Department, dominated by the high schools, is more significant than any evidence presented by Dr. D'Ooge. The department, in its *Syllabus for Secondary Schools* of 1910, prescribed the first two books of the *Gallic War*; it further increased the Commission's prescription by two speeches of Cicero and a book of the *Aeneid*. This action was explained in these words: "The eminence of the men who composed the Commission and the representative positions which they occupy render their report worthy of adoption by all schools at as early a date as may be possible. But owing to the fact that in this state as in all other states there are many schools that cannot at once meet the conditions of this report which are ideal, the following syllabus has been prepared substantially in accord with the recommendations of the Commission." That is to say, the Commission's proposals were thought, not too narrow, but too broad. It is significant, too, that the College-Entrance Examination Board has felt

obliged up to this time to continue its examinations on the old prescription side by side with those based on the recommendations of the Commission. Last June 308 candidates took the examination in four prescribed books of the *Gallic War*, 740 the sight-examination in second-year Latin. This condition has persisted in spite of the willingness of the colleges to accept the results of the new examinations and the omission of the old prescription from the requirements of almost all the colleges.

I wish to make it clear that I do not disagree with the ideas that underlie Dr. D'Ooge's arguments, though I maintain that the arguments are misdirected. These ideas are, I take it, two: first, that the schools should be left free to work out the salvation of Latin; second, that the chief danger comes from the conduct of the work in the first two years of the course. In theory, there should be no quantitative requirement, no limitation of the choice of reading, no prescription of particular works; the teachers would get better results if they were free to suit the material to their students and to keep their eyes fixed on mastery of the subject rather than the amount of reading. I have myself long been wedded to this theory, but I am not blind to the facts. No one who has had experience in weighing school certificates or in setting college-entrance examinations can fail to see that some standard is necessary. Moreover, as the committee of Twelve said, "If a standard is made too elastic, its value as a standard is destroyed." The colleges admitting on certificate cannot set up any palpable standard that is not quantitative. The "unit" does indeed allow the schools to regard the quality of their work, but it is the most mechanical of quantitative standards, and recent discussion has shown that it has all the imperfections of such a standard. An examination in sight-translation presents the best criterion of the quality of the student's work, his power, and progress. The examination must, however, be carefully adapted to a norm of preparation, and the establishment of the norm involves some agreement as to both the amount and the range of the reading. Furthermore, the prescription of a small part of the reading not only can be defended on the ground that it enforces intensive study, but is in the interest of the examinee, in so far as it furnishes the

basis of the tests in grammar and composition and a check upon the result of any ill-considered test in sight-translation.

In my opinion, as in Dr. D'Ooge's, there is imperative need of reform in the work of the first two years of the course. It is now so hurried that it loses much of its immediate value and affords a poor preparation for further study. The teacher should have time to drill his class of beginners on new forms and constructions until they have been thoroughly learned, adding to the exercises of the book as much as may be necessary; and there should be considerable reading of simple graded Latin—so simple that it can be read with a sense of mastery and so carefully graded as to give an opportunity for full consideration of each new difficulty. This means, of course, simplified or "made" Latin, and doubtless entails, in the case of most high schools, a reduction in the reading of the canonical works. The reduction would be less than might be supposed, since the thorough preparation would make it possible to do the later reading more intelligently and more rapidly; and I am positive that students so taught would be able to pass an examination in the sight-translation of Caesar at the end of the second year.

I fancy that Dr. D'Ooge does not, in his own teaching, feel the pressure of college-entrance requirements, and that his denunciation of the dictation of the colleges is more or less speculative. I mean that it arises not so much from any knowledge that the present entrance requirements in Latin actually hamper the schools as from idealism. In the greater part of the country the school merely certifies to the college the number of years of Latin that a student has had, and the colleges requiring entrance examinations now set examinations in Latin that any properly taught student of fair ability is competent to pass, and accept the results of the examinations without scrutiny of the content of the preparatory course.